DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 397 680 FL 024 007

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TITLE The Sociolinguistic Status of Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin: An Overview.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT International Journal of Sociology of Language; n100-101 p167-78 1993

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS African Languages; Foreign Countries; *Intercultural Communication; *Language Patterns; Language Planning; *Language Role; Language Usage; Official Languages; *Pidgins; Sociolinguistics; Uncommonly Taught Languages
IDENTIFIERS *Anglo Nigerian Pidgin; *Nigeria

ABSTRACT

An analysis of the status of Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin (ANP) looks at its origins and evolution in Nigerian history, its location in the Nigerian language situation, and its current sociolinguistic status. It is concluded that ANP possesses linguistic structures that have stabilized enough to give the speaker an impression of good and bad grammar. Beyond the important role it plays as an interethnic lingua franca, it is now commonly used by youths of the same tribe for peer communication, indicating a language function shift and giving it the status of a language. While ANP is the most appropriate and most frequently used lingua franca in Nigeria today, its social prestige and credibility as a language in its own right have not been significantly enhanced. The sociopsychological resistance it is encountering, partly attributable to its history of subjugation, is better explained by the absence of formalization and political recognition in language planning. It is also suggested that the sociolinguistic survival of ANP is not assured, particularly if the political context in Nigeria were to change. Contains 31 references. (MSE)

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The sociolinguistic status of Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin: an overview

CHARLES C. MANN

> The history of languages demonstrates convincingly that there is no such thing as an inherently handicapped language. All the great languages of today were once undeveloped.
>
> Einar Haugen (1966)

Preambular remarks

The first remark I will need to make concerns the term "Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin," which will be used in preference to the traditional "Nigerian Pidgin English" or "Nigerian Pidgin," probably for the second time in public reading (see Mann 1988). This preference is to highlight the hybrid origin and nature of the language, that is, pidgin, instead of the so-called superstrate language — English — whose shareholding in the code is relatively minimal in terms of grammar (see Mann 1984; Holm 1988); its contributions predominate, however, at the level of vocabulary, the most dynamic and volatile level of language.

Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin (A.N.P.) is probably the language of the widest interethnic communication in Africa's most populous country: Nigeria. If the following facts are taken into consideration —

– that Nigeria harbors more than 200 ethnic groupings and just as many languages and dialects;

– that one out of every four Africans will be a Nigerian by the year 2000; and finally,

– that Nigeria boasts the highest concentration of black people in the entire world —

then we might better appreciate the sociolinguistic significance and relevance of this hybrid language.

It is useful and important to point out that A.N.P. is probably not the

0165-2516/93/100/101-0167 $2.00 *Int'l. J. Soc. Lang. 100/101 (1993), pp. 167–178*
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only pidgin in Nigeria, although it is the only Euro-African pidgin of any consequence yet unearthed. Ian Hancock (see Hymes 1971) cites "Barikanci," a Hausa pidgin that evolved around British Army barracks in colonial northern Nigeria, and "Galgaliya," an Arabic pidgin used by the Kalmalefi people in the northeastern part of the country. Besides these, and given that pidgins and creoles are products of languages in sustained contact, there is the possibility that other hybrid languages or forms of language might yet be discovered in the country.

As has been stated already in an earlier write-up (Mann 1988) a pidgin, while being the fruit of a period of sustained contact of languages, is not necessarily a crossbreed between African and European languages (of which it is often erroneously said to be a simplified version), nor does it essentially originate from circumstances of slave trade, plantation cultures, or conventional trading. A pidgin will almost certainly develop when languages are in sustained contact, especially in a multilingual scenario of languages sufficiently differentiated in structure and constitutive elements, and where there is a need and or desire for lingual intercomprehension.

Historically speaking, the birth and development of A.N.P. probably spans more than five centuries, that is, since the arrival of Portuguese explorers on the southern shores of the Niger Delta region in the fifteenth century. Given the very multilingual matrix in this region, it is not unthinkable that there already existed a pidgin form of the various ethnic languages and dialects, predominantly of the Kwa group of languages, derived through regular contact and trade. The arrival of the Portuguese (locally called "Potoki") could therefore, in the light of the foregoing, very well have been a phase of repidginization and relexification in the direction of Portuguese. A further phase of these processes was to take place three centuries later, through contacts with British traders, missionaries, and adventurists. Since colonial rule in the nineteenth century, and the subsequent imposition of English as the language of instruction and administration, A.N.P. has evolved linguistically with more focus and stability, so as to give the appearance of a creole (using Mühlhäusler's [1986] criteria).

This paper sets out to examine the sociolinguistic status of A.N.P. against the age-long but still lively and contemporary debate over an indigenous official language for Nigeria; and its relative importance and status vis-à-vis the other prominent languages in coexistence with it, namely English, Nigerian English (regarded as a dialect of English by a number of Nigerian linguists), Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo. The author depends, for his understanding of the term "sociolinguistic," on the

definition in Pride and Holmes (1972: 7): "...the study of the structure and use of language in its social and cultural contexts." This study is being called an "overview" because it is meant to be panoramic. A more detailed survey, based on fieldwork with questionnaires, interviews, recorded speech samples, etc., is envisaged for the near future and should, I hope, bring more detail to bear on this some-what introductory exposé. A binary score-chart, using linguistic and sociolinguistic parameters of evaluation — which are not meant to be exhaustive — is provided in table form, for whatever indices it might furnish in pursuance of this analysis.

1. A.N.P. and the language situation in Nigeria

For a hybrid language that has been in existence for up to five centuries, it is not unusual, nor unexpected, to ask if it has evolved from the unenviable tag of "pidgin" to the more prestigeous title of "creole." While A.N.P. is most actively spoken in the linguistic communities around Warri, Sapẹlẹ, and Ẹffurum (in the Bendel state), where it would seem to have matured, linguistically speaking, even possibly with different social registers and lects, I would be reluctant to agree with those Nigerian linguists (like Elugbe and Omamor 1984) who believe that it has "nativized" in this region, that is, that it has assumed the role and status of mother tongue for these indigenes. From personal observation in the field, I would maintain, as stated in Mann (1988), that it is learned side-by-side with the ethnic mother tongue. The latter could be the language of the immediate community, that of the parents, or, in some cases, even both.

In other parts of Nigeria — except maybe in cosmopolitan urban centers — its linguistic growth and spread are not regionally encouraged because of the domineering presence of other lingue franche such as Hausa (in the north) and Yoruba (in the west/southwest). In urban centers, where A.N.P. is in regular demand for intertribal communication — and is therefore sociolinguistically alive — its growth has been steady; but not necessarily rapid; its most active area of growth being that of vocabulary, in terms of word borrowing. Given that the urban Nigerian has to operate in a multilingual setting, learning his ethnic language (at home), English (at school), the community language (with peer groups), etc., A.N.P. is usually acquired as third or fourth language. It is often inevitably indispensable in its usual contexts of usage, which will be highlighted later on. Suffice it to say here that A.N.P. also serves as a more frequent outlet for Nigerians of different ethnolinguistic back-

grounds, who code-switch to comprehend one another. As already alluded to in the preambular remarks, A.N.P. is a lingua franca in as far as it is "...a language which is used as a means of communication among people who have no native language in common" (Trudgill 1972: 157). Hausa serves the same purpose of "substitute language" (see Schultze 1933) in northern Nigeria, where it is used by the Fulanis, Kanuris, Tivs, Nupes, and others for interethnic communication. It owes its spread to pre-colonial trading networks, and its present attraction to the fact that it is the language of the country's political power brokers, as well as of the Moslem and military leadership in Nigeria.

Contrary to the opinion of E.C. Rowlands (1963), Yoruba could also be regarded as a lingua franca in that it is usually the second language of other-language speakers in the northwest of Bendel state (such as Auchi), in Kwara state (Ilorin), and on account of a geographically detached but related language — Itshẹkiri — which is regarded as one of its dialects. Apart from pockets of urban centers in the former northern and western Regions of Nigeria — where one would find high interethnic coexistence (or conflict) — these two lingue franche reduce its *raison d'être*, or, better still, *raison d'usage* in these regions and, therefore, delimit its zones of influence, geolinguistically.

While English would appear to have an edge over A.N.P. as the official language of instruction and administration, the sociolinguistic spread of A.N.P. is practically coincidental with that of English (or "Nigerian English") in that the need to resort to them (for communication across tribes), outside the areas of influence of the other two aforementioned lingue franche (Hausa and Yoruba), would seem to arise in similar sociolinguistic environments. What this means, in effect, is that, horizontally speaking, it would be difficult to come across an area where English is spoken but A.N.P. is not. However, far from being the whole story, A.N.P. clearly has more speakers than English and enjoys far more sociostratal depth than it does in these areas of coappearance. It is a predominant phenomenon to find members of the lower social classes, who have not enjoyed the privilege of access to learning English, being able to communicate in A.N.P. (as distinct from "broken English").

The state of development of A.N.P. as a language, today, is such that one can distinguish between "good" and "bad" A.N.P. speakers. The language clearly has a (core) grammar (see Elugbe and Omamor 1984; Mann 1984), whose rules one would need to adhere to in order to be regarded as speaking "correct" A.N.P. Moreover, A.N.P. possesses fluent speakers who are capable not only of good grammar but also of rapid conversational speech. Fluency is defined here as in Rubin (1968: 72),

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that is "the ability to carry on a continuous conversation without hesitating because of morphological or syntactic doubts."

The degree of dialectalization and stylization a language has undergone is a regular linguistic cue for determining how "natural," stabilized, or standard it is. While A.N.P. evinces, linguistically, the coloration of the locale in which it is spoken (depending on the host ethnic language[s]), it is not likely that these ethnolinguistic variations — which are actually more in the nature of phonetico-phonological interference — can be considered, yet, as dialects of A.N.P. In terms of style, some variations have been observed (by the author) in the version spoken by the young generation of middle- or upper-class background; this version shows traits of decreolization in the use of lexical items and certain morpho-syntactic variants that are closer to proper English. An age-specific style was observed (by the author) in Warri, where the underteens use a fast and trendy slang for peer-group communication. This slang makes frequent use of onomatopoeic effects — instead of words and phrases — for descriptive purposes. To sum up, the present linguistic state of A.N.P. cannot be said to be that of an incipient pidgin — whatever this means in real linguistic terms! — nor is it that of a "nativized" one (see Mühlhäusler 1986; Holm 1988).

2. The sociolinguistic status of A.N.P.

In an article published in the Nigerian *Guardian*, Ituen (1985) tries to retrace the origins of the special appeal of A.N.P., especially to various social groups in urban Nigeria. He recalls the pan-Africanist and black-consciousness fervor of the 1970s, coated with a certain antielitism championed by the young generation, who were desirous of an acceptable language of identity and authenticity to replace the foreign language that English was, and still represents. While he does not fail to mention the multiethnic composition of Nigerian urban society as one of A.N.P.'s "secrets of success," he also refers to the "crass materialism" exhibited by the vastly uneducated *nouveaux riches* of the infamous oil-boom era, and how, after having attained socioeconomic uplift, they gave some social advertisement and glamor to their better idiom of interethnic communication: A.N.P.

In furtherance of Ituen's point as to how the youth serve as vectors for the social promotion of A.N.P., it should be mentioned that Nigerian University campuses have become a primary locale for communication in A.N.P. And it is not enough to say, in this case, that the ethnic mixture of the student population is wholly responsible for this state of affairs.

A.N.P. has become a trendy code for the young generation, in which they discuss their lectures, social life, politics, and love affairs. It serves as a marker of the new detribalized generation of Nigerians. It is not unusual to find two or more students of the same ethnic origin — who can communicate equally well in their mother tongue — resorting to A.N.P. for intragroup communication.

Another fast-growing platform for A.N.P. promotion and usage is the occupational domain, especially in urban centers. While, traditionally, A.N.P. usage was more restricted to short-lived but regular customer-trader exchanges, and at best to professions like the police force, the army, and factory labor, it has slowly extended its area of demand up the professional ladder; so much so that it is spoken today, without much ado, by teachers, by doctors and nurses in hospitals, in the civil service, and even in banks.

As already mentioned above, buying and selling exchanges in urban centers constitute the more frequent domain of A.N.P. usage, this has not changed significantly. When a Yoruba customer approaches an Ibo retail trader to purchase sparkplugs for his car, he knows that he will, invariably, use A.N.P. to ease communication, in isolation from his ethnic language and in preference to English (or Nigerian English). It is also not unlikely that a customer who exhibits high communicative competence in A.N.P. will end up with a better bargain for his money than one who uses English (or Nigerian English), since the latter is inevitably associated with the more comfortable elite class.

The media, that is, newspapers, the radio, television, and advertising, are a social context in which A.N.P. could be seen to have made a permanent breakthrough. Apart from the pioneer articles on the amorous adventures of Wakabout — the rascally character in the *Lagos Weekend* — an increasing number of prestigeous tabloids (such as *The Guardian*, *Lagos Life*, etc.) now carry articles of sociopolitical analyses and poetry — transcribed *pacuri* — in their editions. A good number of radio stations (such as Radio Bendel and Radio Rivers) relay newscasts in ethnic languages of their states, as well as in A.N.P. Radio music-request programs and discussions of current social and political issues are also presented in A.N.P. (for example on Radio Nigeria 2). N.T.A. Benin is also known to present newscasts in A.N.P. Radio jingles and t.v. advertisements of public interest, or of products that hope to catch a federal audience are, more often than not, in A.N.P. However, the greatest amount of airtime in A.N.P. is taken up by the very popular drama presentations like "Masquerade," "Village headmaster," "Hotel de Jordan," "Samanja" (an Army drama serial), "Behind the clouds," etc. In addition to its function of capturing a wider audience, many

Nigerian viewers find in A.N.P. the humoristic appeal English does not and cannot provide. As Ituen (1985) rightly points out, "...the Nigerian experience has shown that drama presentations done with a combination of standard and pidgin English probably have greater audience reception than those done solely in the standard English idiom."

The use of A.N.P. for more formal literature cannot but be discussed in the context of its lack, to date, of standardization and formalization. In addition to some direct-speech excerpts in Chinua Achebe's (1960) *No Longer at Ease*, pioneer writers like Saro-Wiwa (1985) and Fatunde (1985, 1986) have tried their hands at writing prose, drama, and poetry in A.N.P. Their efforts, while innovative and commendable, will come to naught in the absence of a standard model of the language, especially in terms of orthography. Besides, the Nigerian population is still vastly illiterate, and reading — even for the literate — certainly does not possess the same attraction as does, for example, music.

The propagation of A.N.P. through music merits special mention, aside from the examination of the usual media devices. Some of the more popular Nigerian musicians have frequently and constantly sung in A.N.P. for example, Victor Uwaifo, Rex Jim Lawson, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Eddie Okonta, etc. The themes of their songs range from disappointment in love to nationalism and pan-Africanism. Clearly the best example of this lot is Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, whose political thinking and audience awareness transformed him and his music from the likes of "Watermelon man" — sung in English in the 1960s, through "Jeun koo ku" — sung in Yoruba in the early 1970s — to "Lady," "Alagbon Close," "Zombie," and "Army Arrangement," rendered in A.N.P. in the later 1970s and 1980s; all these records were immediate smash hits. The added significance of this example is that Anikulapo-Kuti is a Yoruba by origin — a tribe into which the use of A.N.P. has not completely penetrated.

The use of A.N.P. in everyday conversational contexts will be our next concern. Although this might apply more to Nigerians from the south and midwest of the country, A.N.P. would seem to be used for topics ranging from the girl next door, to a social critique of the government of the day. It has not yet acquired the status of usage, on a daily basis, for discussions of science and technology and formal philosophical discourse; but then, we can say that none of the ethnic languages has either. A.N.P. is used more generally for casual, relaxed, and often intimate conversations, on a daily basis, by those who use it regularly. For those who do not use it exclusively on a daily basis, A.N.P. is more often than not *the* language of code-switching (from the diverse ethnic languages). Given that most of the contexts that require a switch in codes at all, on

a regular basis, are informal — and therefore do not require English (or Nigerian English) necessarily — A.N.P. is usually the natural and best candidate for such switches in code.

What significant correlations exist, if any, between age, sex and A.N.P.? As mentioned above, the urban youth are the best champions of the linguistic and social promotion of A.N.P. for reasons of identity with the greater mass of the people, authenticity, nationalism, and the sheer reality of inevitably evolving in a multiethnic urban context. The older urban generation show some conservatism in favor of proper English; while the older rural population, not having had access to English, employ the only languages they have always really needed to use, their ethnic languages. In spite of a renewed educational drive — though ineffectual in my opinion — to bring the very young ones up in their tribal languages and "good" English, the net result of this policy would appear to have more bearing on the social class of the child and the sociolinguistics of his immediate locale.

There does not seem to be any significant imbalance between the sexes in their use of A.N.P. What can be remarked, however, is that women might seem more socially constrained to use A.N.P., for example for shopping in public markets and for petty trading. Men, for their part, demonstrate a slightly more culturally conservative attitude — even if they recognize the utility and inevitability of using A.N.P., especially in the occupational domain.

Religion is another social domain to investigate in terms of the use of A.N.P. since it does determine, to some extent, the contexts of and attitudes to its usage. Moslems — regarded by many as the most numerous religious group — resort to Arabic, Hausa, or, more recently, Yoruba for preaching. English, though also used, is fundamentally regarded as the language of Christianity. Christians predominantly use English and, due to the pragmatism of some missionary groups, tribal languages for pastoral work; the Latin factor in Catholicism is practically stagnant, if not receding. In many parts of the south and southeast, A.N.P. has become *the* language of religious preachings, especially in the more informal cutaway versions of orthodox Christianity — and there have been quite a number in the last decade. Some sermons are also aired on the radio in A.N.P.

In the final analysis, what then, we could ask, is the position of A.N.P. in terms of social recognition and prestige? As far as the eye can see, A.N.P. is essentially only as socially recognized as it is utilitarian as a lingua franca in contexts of multiethnic communication. This brings to mind what Tanner (1967: 18) also observed about the Indonesian example: "It is this one fact — that Indonesian is not the vernacular of any one

prominent Indonesian ethnic group — that has given it its great advantage and which has made it acceptable to all Indonesians, whatever their vernacular." The latter part of this quotation does not, unfortunately, apply completely to A.N.P. since, for speakers of Nigeria's major languages, it still bears the double connotation of language of colonization and of vulgarization. Unlike English, however, which serves the same purpose as a nontribal lingua franca, A.N.P.'s sociolinguistic spread and depth make it the number one national lingua franca. While English is regarded as a standard, formalized, and "proper" language, A.N.P. is seen as a nonstandard, nonformalized, but socioculturally more essential and intimate language.

Except among the urban youth, to whom A.N.P.'s functions would seem to go beyond merely easing multiethnic communication, it clearly does not register in the minds of its users as "a language with a grammar," autonomy, or prestige. Although most Nigerians revel in the humor it conveys in the numerous episodes of "Masquerade" and "Hotel de Jordan," they do not appear to have given the slightest serious thought to enhancing and extending its social standing; this is the sociopsychological tragedy of A.N.P. in Nigerian society.

Let us now take a look at our binary score-chart in Table I to see how, theoretically, A.N.P. fares vis-à-vis the other languages of prominence. The remarks that follow must be made so as to ensure a better appreciation of the scores indicated in the Table.

i. In spite of the relatively high score of English (20) vis-à-vis the other languages evaluated — it scores a minus in only three sectors — its sociolinguistic grip on the ground is far from proportional to this high rating. On the other hand, the same lopsidedness can be remarked for A.N.P. — though in the reverse sense — since it is in reality a language much closer to a greater number of Nigerians, linguistically speaking, than English is. We should also observe that most of the minuses it scores, if not all, are attributable to its lack of standardization and political privilege.

ii. The minuses and pluses used in the score-chart, while serving as general indicators of status, could be quite misleading since they do not indicate the *degree* to which the language evaluated enjoys the status in question. To mention an example: whereas English, Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo are shown to enjoy social prestige, it is certainly not on an equal footing and would also depend on the context of usage. In the same wise, a parliamentarian who resorts to Hausa for debates on the floor of the senate will certainly not get the same kind of reception and reaction as one who uses English.

Table 1. *Sociolinguistic profile of Nigeria's principal languages*

	English	A.N.P.	Hausa	Yoruba	Ibo
Educational status					
primary	+	–	+	+	+
secondary					
used for instruction	+	–	–	–	–
taught as a subject	+	–	+	+	+
university					
used for instruction	+	–	–	–	–
taught as a subject	+	–	+	+	+
science and technology	+	–	–	–	–
Lingua franca status					
intranational	+	+	+	+	+
national	+	+	–	–	–
subregional	+	+	+	–	–
Standard orthography	+	–	+	+	+
Linguistic research	+	–	+	+	+
Established literature	+	–	+	+	+
Authenticity and identity					
cultural	–	–	+	+	+
national	–	+	–	–	–
social	–	+	–	–	–
Social prestige	+	–	+	+	+
Media					
national	+	+	+	+	+
foreign	+	–	+	–	–
Business commerce	+	+	+	+	+
Parliamentary debates	+	–	+	+	+
Political campaigns	+	+	+	+	+
Religious preaching	+	+	+	+	+
Courts of justice	+	–	+	+	+
Total scores	20	9	17	15	15

iii. A.N.P. has been scored a plus as a West African lingua franca on account of the considerable intercomprehensibility that exists between speakers of Sierra Leonian Krio, Liberian Creole, and A.N.P. speakers.

iv. For the avoidance of ambiguity, evaluative parameters such as dialectalization, stylization, "modernization" — defined by Ferguson (1968: 28) as "...intertranslatability with other languages in a range of topics and forms of discourse characteristic of industrialized, secularized, structurally differentiated, modern societies" — and philosophical thought have been excluded from the chart.

3. Conclusion

Throughout our general survey of the sociolinguistic status of A.N.P., three things seem quite apparent about the state of the language itself; we shall now proceed to look at these salient points in our conclusion.

First, A.N.P. possesses linguistic structures that have stabilized to such an extent as to give the proficient speaker a clear-enough impression of when "good" or "bad" grammar has been employed. Quite beyond the vital role it plays as an interethnic lingua franca, we have noticed that it is now commonly used by youths of the same tribal origin for peer-group communication. In other words, A.N.P. — at least for this category of speakers — is being used, at present, in its own right as a language *per se*, and no longer necessarily as a lingua franca. I would like to call this evolutive process one of *language function shift*, or *language function readjustment*.

Second, A.N.P. is the most appropriate and most frequently used interethnic lingua franca in Nigeria today. Notwithstanding this essential service it renders, its social prestige and credibility, as a language in its own right, have not been significantly enhanced thereby.

Finally, the sociopsychological resistance it is encountering, while being partly attributable to its history of subjugation, can be better explained by the absence of formalization and political recognition in the language-planning perception of Nigeria's education planners.

The (socio)linguistic survival of A.N.P. is neither insured nor assured. Paradoxically, if English were to stop playing any significant administrative or educational role today in Nigeria, A.N.P. would almost certainly either repidginize in the direction of the newly promoted language — whatever that language may be — or gradually die out. The crucialness of extralinguistic factors — especially the political ones — has already been well underlined by Hall (1972: 151): "As long as no political considerations are involved, pidgins or creoles have little or no chance of achieving recognition on the basis of intrinsic merit, or even usefulness, alone."

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From: Mann CCP Mr (ELI) <Charles.Mann@surrey.ac.uk>
To: marcoskathleen <kathleen@cal.org>
Date: 7/20/96 12:40pm
Subject: Re: Papers for ERIC.

20th July, '96.

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Regards,

Charles C. MANN.
Lecturer.

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